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No. 5 Hamilton Place, Boston, Massachusetts

Much Too Sudden

A Comedy in One Act

By

ALICE C. THOMPSON

*Author of "A Peck of Trouble," "Susan's Finish,"
"The Truth About Jane," "Romantic Mary," etc.*

BOSTON

WALTER H. BAKER & CO.

1910

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Much Too Sudden

CHARACTERS

MRS. ALSTON.

GRACE }
MABEL } *her daughters.*
MARY }

MRS. MORSE }
MRS. BLIGH } *visitors.*

NORAH, *the maid.*

PROPERTIES

A book, doll, duster, two visiting cards, two letters, a flower box, a telegram, a large doll (for baby).

TIME :—To-day.



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Much Too Sudden

SCENE.—*Parlor in MRS. ALSTON's country home. A simply furnished room. At R. C., a large armchair, sofa at L. C., smaller chairs here and there; at back, R., a chair on which is a large rather shabby doll. On the sofa a book. A door at C. Entrance down L.*

(At rise of curtain NORAH is discovered arranging room and dusting. She has gray hair, a rosy face and wears a large white apron over gingham dress.)

NORAH *(picking up doll)*. Miss Mabel's doll. Begorra! 'Tis a beauty. *(Puts it down roughly and goes to sofa picking up book.)* And Miss Mary's book. Fairy tales! *(Drops book.)* I wonder for how much longer they're to be put off with the loikes of this, poor darlints. Shure, I've got a mind to shpake up meeself, I do be feelin' that cross this marnin'. I wisht somethin' would happen, so I do.

(A knock at C. NORAH opens door. MRS. MORSE, a young fashionably dressed woman, is seen on threshold.)

MRS. M. Does Mrs. Alston live here?

NORAH. She do, ma'am.

Enter MRS. M.

MRS. M. Is she at home?

NORAH. She be, ma'am.

MRS. M. *(giving card)*. Please give her my card. *(Comes down C.)*

(A knock at C. NORAH opens door. MRS. BLIGH, also a young woman, is seen at C.)

MRS. B. Is this Mrs. Alston's house?

NORAH. It be that, ma'am.

Enter MRS. B.

MRS. B. Is she in? (*Sees* MRS. M.) Why, my dear Mrs. Morse!

MRS. M. Mrs. Bligh. (*Goes to her.*) What a pleasure this is!

MRS. B. I saw some one coming up the walk, but I didn't recognize you. (*To* NORAH.) Will you give this card to Mrs. Alston?

(NORAH *takes card and goes out L., holding a card in each hand.*)

MRS. M. How time flies! To think that it is six months since we parted in Italy.

(*They sit at R. C.*)

MRS. B. You went on to Spain, did you not?

MRS. M. Yes, I was so sorry you couldn't come too, and Mrs. Alston. We had such a lovely visit.

MRS. B. But my husband was bent on going to Norway, and Mrs. Alston—poor dear—she said she had to get back to her three little girls.

MRS. M. A most affectionate mother.

MRS. B. I should think so. How much she spoke of her children. Do you know, Mrs. Morse, I've often thought that—that Mrs. Alston might have married again, if it hadn't been for her three little girls. It must be hard to leave young children—almost babies—you may say, at home.

MRS. M. And yet what a gay creature she was!

MRS. B. Yes, always ready for any pleasure.

MRS. M. She's coming.

Enter MRS. A., L. *She is an older woman than her visitors but is dressed very youthfully.*

MRS. B. My dear Mrs. Alston!

MRS. A. Mrs. Bligh. And Mrs. Morse. (*Goes to them with hands out.*) How good of you to come together.

MRS. M. We met here.

MRS. B. As soon as I returned to America, I said to Jimmy, "I'm going to see Mrs. Alston."

MRS. M. And so did I. At least I said so to Dickie.

MRS. A. I often think of the delightful days we spent in Italy. How I long to return!

MRS. M. Come with us next year.

MRS. B. Are you going again? So am I.

MRS. A. Oh, I cannot. You forget—my duty to my darling children.

MRS. M. Your sweet little girls. I'm *so* anxious to see them.

MRS. B. Do bring them in, Mrs. Alston.

MRS. A. Yes, certainly you must see them, but I think they are out just now, and my eldest daughter is in New York.

MRS. M. But aren't you afraid to trust the poor child in that great city?

MRS. A. Oh, she is with friends. Grace is very musical.

MRS. B. So she is studying music?

MRS. M. But we shall see your other two little ones. Let me see, I think I remember their names—one was Mary——

MRS. B. And one was Mabel. (*Rises.*) And I believe that is her doll, the dear little soul.

MRS. A. (*rising*). Wouldn't you like to go down and see our village? We have a very good library.

MRS. M. Very much. (*Rises.*)

MRS. A. And then you must both come back here to supper.

MRS. M. Then we'll see the dear children?

MRS. A. Yes, if they come in. (*All go up c.*)

MRS. B. Whatever will you do when your little girls grow up and marry?

MRS. A. Oh, don't speak of it, it's too painful.

[*Exeunt, c.*]

Enter L., MABEL. She is seventeen but wears rather short skirts—a simple white dress with pink ribbon sash. Reads a letter as she enters.

MABEL (*reading aloud*). "My darling Mabel:—I am coming this afternoon to see your mother and ask her permission to make you my wife." (*Looks around stealthily.*) Oh, that smirking doll! (*Seizes doll.*) You stupid old thing! There you sit day after day with an eternal smile on your face, and your hands stuck out for me to take you. And you know I won't. I haven't played with you for over three years and I never shall again. I'm going to give you away to the first

child I meet. There! (*Tosses doll down on face.*) I've got something much better than a doll now. (*Lifts it up and sets it straight on chair.*) Poor old thing! I used to be so fond of you!

(*Glances off L., and hides letter in sash.*)

Enter MARY. She wears a short white dress with blue sash.

MARY. Where's mother?

MABEL. I think she has gone out. Oh, Mary, what am I going to do? Here's a letter from Leonard. He says he's coming this afternoon to see mother. He won't wait any longer.

MARY. He's not as patient as my poor Walter. Here we've been engaged for six months and no one even suspects it.

MABEL. But you've got your ring on. How daring!

MARY. Just for to-day. I'm going out sailing with Walter. He has been asking for five weeks why I don't wear it.

MABEL. But if mother sees it?

MARY. I must remember to take it off. Oh, it's dreadful to have to act like this.

MABEL. If only mother would realize we are grown up.

MARY. And that we will not be put off with fairy-stories any longer.

(*Takes book up from sofa and drops it in disgust.*)

Enter NORA, with a box of flowers.

NORA. For you, Miss Mary.

MARY (*taking box*). From Walter.

(*Hastily puts box under sofa.*)

NORA. Miss Mary, 'scusin' the liberty, I do think it's high toime a tuck was let out of your skirt.

MARY. So do I, Nora. But I haven't dared to do it.

NORA. Shure, if yez don't make a shtart soon, ye'll foind yerselves at the ind of tin years eggsactly in the same spot. It's toime ye growed up.

MABEL. You're right, Nora, you're right.

NORA. 'Tis you as puts me in mind av the ould gintleman—Mr. Winkelton I think 'twas his name—who went to

slape fer a hunderd years and woke up and found all his friends bent and gray with age and him shtill a young bye, ye may say.

MABEL (*mischievously*). Was he an Irishman, Norah?

NORAH. Not a bit av it! 'Tisn't the Oirish lad wad go to shlapin' fer such a while, lavin' all the fun to the lads down beyant.

MARY. She means Rip Van Winkle, and he was a Dutchman, Norah.

NORAH. And you'll soon bate the Dootch, all right, if yez don't make a shtart to grow. I know what I'm talkin' about, dipind on it, for I've lived with yer mother fer nigh on twenty-one years, and a sweeter lady doesn't live; but she will think toime shtands shtill for her. Such a purty young thing she was when you was all little! But I soon got to know the tricks av her, for 'twas always after a compliment she'd be, a-sayin' to me, "Norah," she says, "do put a tuck in the childern's dresses. 'They do be growin' that fast.'" And shure, I've been puttin' in tucks fer seventeen years. Now I want to see yez let out a few. (*Goes up c.*) You think it over.

[*Exit, L.*

MABEL. Norah is right. It's time we grew up. Who would think I was seventeen?

MARY. And I nineteen. And still we're children to mother.

MABEL. Let's tell her to-day about Leonard and Walter. Let's grow up at once.

MARY. Oh, it's much too sudden. It would be such a shock. (*Clutches MABEL's arm.*) And what about Grace? Who is going to tell her about Grace?

MABEL. I wish Norah knew. I don't believe I have the courage. Grace married for over a year —

MARY. — And Bobbie cutting his teeth. Mother thinks Grace is still teaching music in the convent. Here is her last letter. (*Pulls letter from sash and reads aloud.*) "I really think, dear Mary, that you ought to tell mamma. It will all be so sudden —" (*Glances down page.*) "Our darling Bobbie does not seem so well this warm weather. I long to take him home where he could get fresh country air. It is hard to bring up a baby in New York. Arthur says I should go home at once with him, but I'm afraid mother won't forgive me for getting married." (*Puts letter in sash.*) Now what are we going to do?

MABEL. I don't know what you are going to do, but I must

prepare mother for Leonard. He is so determined. He won't wait another day.

Enter NORAH, with a telegram.

NORAH. Here's a telegram; the bye's jist brought it up from the village. It's for Miss Mary.

MARY (*taking it*). From New York. (*Opens it.*) It's from Grace.

NORAH. How is Miss Grace? I'll be bound she's lonesome, livin' away off in that great big city.

MARY (*reading*). "Expect me Tuesday with baby."

NORAH. What! Read that agin, miss. Who's baby?

MARY (*reading*). "He is teething."

NORAH. Teething! The saints presarve us! What's the manin' of it?

MARY (*reading*). "Arthur will follow." There, now we're in for it. Grace is coming home with baby.

NORAH. Miss Grace married! And has a baby! Oh, me ears must be desavin' me, fer shure! I can't belave it. Does your mother know?

MARY. She knows nothing.

MABEL. Not a word to her, Norah. We must break it gently. Leave it to us.

NORAH. Oh, this is the wonderfulest news that iver I heard. A baby! Good luck to him, the darlint. (*Goes to L.*) Why, Miss Mary, Miss Mabel, have you thought av it? Your mamma will be a—grandmother!

[*Exit.*]

MABEL. A grandmother!

MARY. A grandmother!

(They stand staring at each other blankly.)

Enter MRS. A., MRS. B., and MRS. M. They come down c.

MRS. M. The yoke is of silver net, the sleeves short —

MRS. A. A Paris gown, of course.

MRS. B. Here are some young ladies.

MRS. A. (*tenderly*). My little girls.

MRS. M. Little girls!

MRS. A. This is my little Mary, and this my youngest—Mabel. Speak to the ladies, children.

MABEL. How do you do?

MARY. How do you do?

MRS. B. But I thought they were children.

MRS. A. (*sentimentally*). They will always be children to me.

MABEL. Not always. (*Looks at MARY. The ladies sit.*)

MRS. M. But I am very much surprised. I had pictured them playing with dolls and reading fairy-tales.

MRS. B. And we find them grown up.

MRS. A. Oh, no, not for many years.

MABEL (*mutinously*). I am seventeen !

MRS. A. Mabel !

MARY. And I am nineteen.

MRS. A. Mary ! I am surprised.

MRS. B. Why, I am only a few years older than Mary, and I've been married for three years.

MABEL. Mary is going to be married and so am I.

MRS. A. Some day, dearest, when you are a young lady. Now run away and play.

MABEL. No, mother, I must speak. I must prepare you, because I don't want you to get a shock. Leonard is coming to see you to-day.

MRS. A. Leonard is coming to see me? (*Smiles.*) Now what can the boy want, I wonder.

MABEL. He wants to marry me.

MRS. A. Marry you ! Why, you foolish child !

MRS. B. Ah, Mrs. Alston —

MRS. A. I never heard of anything more absurd. You, my youngest child, my baby —

MARY. Speaking of babies —

MABEL. Hush, Mary. Mother, you must see him and consent to our engagement.

MRS. A. (*rising*). I will do nothing of the kind. You are much too young. I won't hear of an engagement for many, many years. I am sure my little Mary would not worry me so, nor my darling Grace. (*Collapses on sofa. MARY runs to sofa and bends over her.*) Oh, Mabel, you have quite upset me.

MARY. Poor mother. Please don't cry.

MRS. A. (*starting up*). Mary, where did you get that ring ?

MARY. Oh, my ring !

MRS. M. (*to MRS. B.*). This is getting interesting.

MABEL. Be brave, Mary.

MARY. It is my engagement ring.

MRS. A. Your engagement ring ! Gracious heaven ! You too !

MRS. B. (*to* MRS. M.). It is decidedly interesting.

MARY. I have been engaged to Walter for six months.

MRS. A. (*gasping*). You—engaged! Walter! It is incredible!

MABEL. It is true. I know all about it.

MRS. A. And you said nothing to me. This is perfectly dreadful. Of course I won't hear of it. You are only a child.

MARY. I am not a child any longer. I am—a—woman.

(*Weeps.*)

MABEL. And so am I. (*Weeps.*)

MRS. A. You are both naughty girls. I am shocked to think you would behave like this. Go to your rooms at once. I will come and see you later. Your dear sister Grace would never be guilty of such conduct.

MABEL. Oh, wouldn't she? [*Exit.*]

(*MARY drops on floor and scrambles under sofa, bringing out her box.*)

MRS. A. What is that, Mary?

MARY. Flowers from Walter. [*Exit, with box.*]

MRS. A. This is a terrible shock to me. I can hardly believe it yet. (*Drops on sofa.*) It is so sudden.

MRS. B. I think it would be best to realize that your little girls are now young women. (*Goes to her.*)

MRS. M. And it is natural for young people to want some independence.

MRS. A. If only my dear Grace were here. (*Sobs.*) She would obey me. She was always a good child.

(*Sobs and cries.*)

MRS. M. I'm afraid she's going to have hysterics.

MRS. B. What shall we do?

MRS. A. Oh, Grace, Grace, if you were only home!

Enter NORAH.

NORAH (*running to her*). Now, Mrs. Alston, don't you be breakin' yer heart fer nothin'. 'Twas good advice I give them.

MRS. A. You advised them? Oh, Norah! How dared you?

NORAH. Begorra, 'tis the best day that ever you saw in your loife, ma'am.

MRS. A. Send for Grace. I want her home.

NORAH. Yes, ma'am, she's comin'. She'll soon be here. And she'll give you somethin' ye never had before nor thought to have. My faith, but I'm a'most wishin' I stood in your shoes.

MRS. A. Norah. (*A loud knock at c.*)

NORAH. Here's hopin' that's him, the darlint. (*Enter GRACE in fashionable traveling dress. She carries a baby.*) Miss Grace!

(*Hastily takes baby from GRACE and exits L.*)

GRACE. Mother! (*Comes down c.*)

MRS. A. Grace!

(*GRACE kneels beside her.*)

GRACE. Mother, I've come home. Aren't you well, mother?

MRS. A. (*sitting up*). Oh, I'm so glad to see you, Grace. This is my eldest child, Mrs. Bligh. I suppose I mustn't call you a little girl any longer. You look like a woman.

GRACE. I am a woman.

MRS. A. You all say that now. Oh, I've had such a shock. Your sisters tell me they are engaged.

GRACE (*rising*). I'm so glad. I hope they'll be as happy as I am.

MRS. A. You—you're not engaged, too. Don't tell me ——

(*Rises.*)

GRACE. No, I ——

MRS. A. Oh, thank heaven for that, thank heaven! I have one child left. (*Clasps her to her.*) To hear of those two children being engaged—and in one day—was much too sudden for my feelings as a mother.

GRACE (*nervously*). Oh, but I must tell you. I—I am married.

MRS. A. Married! You! Oh, is the world coming to an end?

GRACE. For over a year.

MRS. A. This is terrible. And you never told me or your sisters.

GRACE. Yes,—they know.

MRS. A. Oh, this is too much. I can bear no more. I feel I am going to faint.

MRS. M. Open the window.

(MRS. B. runs to c., and flings open the door.)

GRACE. You mustn't think of fainting. There is something else.

MRS. A. No, no, I couldn't stand another shock. (*The baby screams loudly at L.*) What's that?

GRACE (*excited*). My baby! my baby!

MRS. A. Baby! Oh! (*Drops in chair.*)

Enter NORAH, carrying baby.

NORAH (*alarmed*). Oh, miss, he's going into convulsions. He's taken a fit; he's coughin' his blessed head off. I'm that scairt.

Enter MABEL.

MABEL. The baby! the baby!

GRACE. Oh, what shall I do?

Enter MARY.

MARY. Shall I go for the doctor?

MRS. M. Thump him on the back.

MRS. B. No, no, turn him upside down.

MRS. A. (*firmly and decidedly*). No. Give him to me. (*Takes baby.*) I know all about babies. The darling. Why, he's teething—that's all the trouble. I know what to do. (*Sits in armchair, baby over knee.*) See, he's going to sleep already.

NORAH (*coming to her*). Ain't he the blessed little angel! I'll have to look after him.

(GRACE, MABEL and MARY drop on their knees at side of chair, MRS. B. and MRS. M. at back.)

MRS. A. No, Norah, I will look after him. I'd like to know who has a better right. I am his grandmother.

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JACK CRACKER, 2D, <i>a fire-</i>	<i>wife.</i>
<i>cracker.</i>	ESTELLE CLAYTON, <i>Jack 2d's</i>
JUNIUS BRUTUS BANG, <i>in the</i>	<i>fiancée.</i>
<i>"profesh."</i>	FLO. ATKINS, <i>Jack's niece.</i>
COFFEE, <i>a colored brother.</i>	KATRINA VON HOOT, <i>Flo's</i>
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MRS. BOB GREY.

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